

At A Glance

An Independent Regulatory Agency

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) is an independent regulatory agency dedicated to serving the public interest. The agency is responsible for the regulation of Wisconsin public utilities, including those that are municipally-owned. The PSC, which receives its authority and responsibilities from the State Legislature, enjoys a national reputation for its innovative and forward-looking approach to the field of utility regulation.

The PSC is on a path of regulatory change that holds the possibility of wide-ranging impacts for all utility customers. The PSC is developing a competitive, market-based approach to utility regulation whenever such an approach is in the public interest. The goals are in keeping with the PSC's statutory obligation to remove barriers to the development of competition and to spur the development of customer choices for all utility services. The PSC has made sweeping changes over the last several years as to how the delivery of utility services in Wisconsin is regulated. In many cases, the PSC has undertaken these changes on its own initiative or, in some cases, in response to changes at the federal level. These actions have occurred in all utility sectors.

Typical types of utilities regulated include electric, natural gas, telephone, water, and combined water and sewer. The PSC's purpose is to ensure that, in the absence of competition, adequate and reasonably priced service is provided to utility customers.

Sets Rates, Services

The PSC sets utility rates and determines levels for adequate and safe service. More than 1,400 utilities are under the agency's jurisdiction. Most of these must obtain PSC approval before instituting new rates, issuing stocks or bonds, or undertaking major construction projects such as power plants, water wells, and transmission lines.

The PSC's staff consists of auditors, accountants, engineers, rate analysts, attorneys, planners, research analysts, economists, consumer specialists, and paraprofessional and clerical support.

In Wisconsin, most activities of the 28 electric cooperatives are not under the jurisdiction of the PSC. Furthermore, fuel oil, propane, coal, and gasoline are energy sources not under the PSC's jurisdiction.

Organization

The PSC is composed of three full-time Commissioners appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate for staggered, six-year terms. One of these Commissioners is appointed chairperson by the Governor for a two-year term. The Commissioners' Office, under the direction of the Chairperson, has oversight of all PSC staff related activities.

The PSC operates under a streamlined management structure and is organized along industry and administrative lines into five operating divisions, the Office of General Counsel, Office of Administrative Law Judge, and the Commissioners' Office.

Electric Division

The Electric Division is responsible for all major aspects of the PSC regulation of electric utilities. Utilities need PSC approval for their rates and for building large power plants or power lines. This division also investigates and addresses stray voltage problems on farms. The division reviews utility finances, corporate structure, merger applications, affiliated interests, and has responsibilities as a small business advocate. For construction cases, the division looks at need, alternatives, costs, and environmental impacts. The division also reviews energy use, conservation programs, proposed power plants, and power lines; and general issues, such as electromagnetic fields. The Electric Division is also responsible for implementing programs which increase competition in the electric utility industry.

Natural Gas Division

The Natural Gas Division is responsible for the PSC's regulation of gas utilities in Wisconsin. It develops short- and long-range plans for regulating these utilities. Functions of the division include: analyzing economic and finance policy; auditing the utilities' accounting practices and financial records in

conjunction with rate cases and related proceedings; reviewing utility construction projects; assuring service adequacy, reliability, and safety; and analyzing and developing utility rates and regulations. The division also evaluates the environmental impacts of utility and PSC actions; develops, monitors, and evaluates utility conservation programs; and intervenes to represent the PSC in cases of regulatory interest before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and other federal regulatory bodies.

Telecommunications Division

The Telecommunications Division is responsible for regulating providers of telecommunications services subject to PSC jurisdiction within the mandates and direction of Wisconsin's "Telecommunications Superhighway" legislation passed in 1994 and, more currently, the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996. The focus of the division is to promote competition in the state's telecommunications markets, to ensure access to modern and affordable telecommunications throughout the state, and to protect consumers. The division oversees price regulation plans and other alternative forms of regulation for telecommunication utilities; reviews earnings and rate levels for utilities still subject to rate jurisdiction; develops procedures for the transition to competitive markets; monitors service quality; reviews tariffs, contracts, and agreements to prevent unfair cross-subsidy and anti-competitive actions; resolves interconnection disputes between service providers;

administers universal service programs; monitors the deployment of advanced telecommunications infrastructure; and, advises the Federal Communications Commission on matters pertaining to Wisconsin’s interests in federal telecommunications policy.

Division of Water, Compliance, and Consumer Affairs

The Division of Water, Compliance, and Consumer Affairs is responsible for the regulation of water and combined water and sewer public utilities in Wisconsin. The division offers assistance to all of the state’s utilities in compliance with the statutes, code, and record keeping requirements and the development of consumer affairs policies. It also coordinates consumer information and resolution of consumer complaints.

Division of Administrative Services

The Division of Administrative Services provides the agency’s human resources and business management services. This includes budget development, revenue collection, intervenor financing coordination, and procurement. The division is also responsible for managing the PSC’s data and information, including data processing services and management of computer hardware and software resources. The division administers employee training and development, recruitment, compensation, and benefit programs, and coordinates the agency’s affirmative action/equal employment opportunity and employee assistance programs. Administrative Services also maintains a central records management system and provides printing, library, mail, and facilities. In addition, the division provides administrative support to the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads.

Office of General Counsel

The Office of General Counsel (OGC) consists of the Commission's attorneys. The OGC provides all legal services to the agency.

Office of Administrative Law Judge

The Office of Administrative Law Judge replaces the Examining Division. The Office consists of the administrative law judge (ALJ) and support staff. The ALJ presides over hearings conducted by the Commission.

Parallel Agencies

The PSC has sole jurisdiction for utility regulation on the state level, but several agencies on the federal level perform parallel regulatory functions. These include the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the Department of Energy.

All divisions represent the PSC on state and national committees requiring staff expertise on utility matters.

Bilingual Service - Servicio Bilingüe

The PSC is also able to provide customer assistance in Spanish. When calling the PSC, please ask to speak to a Spanish speaking representative.

En la Comisión de Servicios Públicos del estado de Wisconsin (PSC) podemos asistirles en Español. Cuando llame a la PSC, pida hablar con un representante de habla hispana.

To contact the PSC call (608) 266-2001 within Madison. If you are out of Madison, dial 1 (800) CAL- PSCW (225-7729); or write to:

**Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
Consumer Affairs
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854**

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the provision of programs, services, or employment. If you are speech, hearing, or visually impaired and need assistance, call (608) 266-5481 or TTY (608) 267-1479. We will try to find another way to get the information to you in a usable form.

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